

Drills/Tips: See linked videos at <https://www.eskofastpitch.com/coaching-resources/softball-drill-ideas-videos/77794> NOTE: Keep arrowhead rules and USSSA handy. Umpires will not likely know the rules and other coaches may think they do.

Throwing

- Playing-catch progression (build the pattern before adding distance):
 - One knee: clean backspin and “fingers behind the ball.”
 - Standing (square): shoulders rotate, hands separate, smooth arm path.
 - Sideways: add weight shift (load back hip, move forward).
 - Sideways + step-and-throw: finish balanced and on target.

Coaching cue: keep the throwing elbow roughly at shoulder height
- Catching/receiving:
 - Teach glove/hand “clock turn” to secure the ball. Use softer balls (softies/whiffles) when needed for confidence.
 - Above chest, turn glove correctly. Find any ‘holes’ with a player and work on that.
 - Advanced: Lines of players and practice relay throws/cut/turn
- Tags: demonstrate tagging to both sides (5 reps each). Many kids haven’t been taught this—so we teach it.
- Once a week: controlled throwing-distance challenge (kids love it; coaches love the motivation).
- Underhand Flips (both directions): groups of 3–4; demonstrate first, then rotate reps.

Fielding

- Ready position: every pitch, every time.
 - Line drill: face the coach, toe-tap/tap, glove out, athletic stance (on toes). Goal: reduce “heel-to-go” time.
- Ground balls:
 - Get in front: chest/head over the ball, glove out early, “alligator hands.” Bring the ball to the throwing-side hip to speed up the throw.
 - No lazy stabbing at the ball. Advanced: work backhand and “through the ball” (can start from knees, turned sideways).
 - Footwork:
 - Timing pattern: step (right-left), field, step (right-left), throw.
 - Scramble drill:
 - Setup idea: 3 coaches, split kids into ~6 small groups (1 coach per station). I can create a diagram and send to coaches.
- Pop flies:
 - For younger players: start with tennis balls (confidence builder).
 - Get under it: chest/eyes lined up. Don’t hold the glove so high it blocks the view—catch when the ball arrives, with two hands.
 - Tennis balls encourage two hands and soft hands (and they’re less scary than a hard ball).
 - Refer to drill #3 on video ‘10 Throwing Drills’
 - Run on toes, not heels. Also: don’t sprint with one arm stretched out the whole time—get to the ball first, then catch it.
 - Start with short fly balls to the back of the infield; split groups with coaches.
 - Zig-zag drill (angles + tracking).
 - Cuts/relays: rotate through outfield spots; practice cuts to 2nd and 3rd.
- Situational defense:
 - Use a few base runners and run game-like scenarios (outs, coverage, where the ball goes).

Running

- Overrun 1st: practice two hard steps past the bag without slowing down.
- Rounding bases: practice tight, efficient turns (no sightseeing tours).
- Sliding: if available, use a slide mat (Tom to coordinate).
- Rule of thumb: slide when it's close (close plays are not the time for toe-first creativity).
- 10U: practice leads after every pitch—be ready to take the next base.
- 12U: get a good lead at pitch release (timing matters).
 - 3rd base leads: demonstrate leading in foul territory and explain the “why.”
 - Return to the bag watching the ball—if there's a throw, dive back hands-first.

Hitting

- Mechanics:
 - Grip: common mistake is over-gripping/over-rotating the hands—keep it athletic and comfortable.
 - Avoid chopping down. Use high-tee work to train a good swing path.
- Stations (keep groups small and reps high):
 - Soft toss:
 - If you have an extra coach: rapid-fire small whiffle balls (easy to retrieve; low sting factor).
 - If paired up: toss from the side and focus on contact quality.
 - Pitching machine, coach pitch, or controlled live pitching (depending on age/skill).
 - Shag group (rotate so nobody is permanently assigned to “outfield cardio”).
 - Tee work: advanced hitters can set up for pull (inside/front) and opposite field (outside/deeper). Adjust height (up/down) and location (in/out).
 - Cue: stay connected (hands/elbows in), then extend through contact. Demonstrate load → launch (hands + front shoulder to back hip to engage the backside).

Sample Practice Plan

90-minute practice (station-based, low waiting, high reps)

Note: Adjust station count based on coaches/attendance. If you only have one coach, run two stations and keep the rest in a well-managed line—no “standing around pretending to be a fielder” time.

U12 Softball Practice Agenda (4/22/25)

1. 4:00–4:05 Light stretching → dynamic stretching.
2. 4:05–4:10 Catching focus (one knee): partners ~10 ft apart; throw a whiffle ball to different spots around the body.
3. 4:10–4:15 Light toss → long toss (focus: shoulders closed, glove to target).
4. 4:15–4:20 Speed throw: Scott clocks each player's fastest throw.
5. 4:20–4:25 Water break.

Baserunning (4:25–4:35)

- Split into two groups (3rd base and home plate). Practice running through 1st and finishing home correctly. If a runner doesn't run through, they go to the back of the line and do it again (accountability is a beautiful thing).
- Coaches pitch and catch. Split into 4 groups. Line players up on the chalk line with a clear “destination line.” No leaving early—make sure the runner crosses the plate. Steal 2nd on passed balls, jog back, repeat, and celebrate the winners.

Fielding

1. 4:35–4:50 Grounder drill rotations (rotate clockwise every ~3 cycles): SS → 2nd, 2nd → (other) 2nd, 2nd → 1st, 1st → SS.

- 3 at 2nd + 3 at short: coach hits to either; the player not fielding covers and receives.
 - 3 at 2nd (closer to 1st) + 3 at 1st: 2nd throws to 1st; if 1st fields it, race to the bag for the out.
 - 3 at 2nd + 3 at short: coach hits to either; the player not fielding covers and receives.
 - 3 at 2nd (closer to 1st) + 3 at 1st: 2nd throws to 1st; if 1st fields it, race to the bag for the out.
2. 4:50–4:55 “Gold Glove” elimination: grounders from 2nd to 1st (coaches hit; 1st base covered). All grounders and throws must be clean. Last player standing wins.
 3. 4:55–5:00 Pop flies: quick footwork demo, then split into 3 groups if you have 3 coaches and spread out.

Batting Practice (5:00–5:30)

- Divide into 3 groups of 4.
- Group 1: Batting (5 swings each; rotate for 3 rounds).
- Group 2: Gather/field balls (rotate so no one becomes a full-time shagging specialist).
- Group 3: Soft toss whiffle balls (pair up).